

Shadowing

By Keiko Adachi

"Shadowing," which means repeating what a speaker says, may be well known as an exercise for simultaneous interpreting, but this technique is also an excellent way of teaching English.

According to Murphey (1995), there are varieties of shadowing. For example, lecture shadowing is when listeners shadow a speaker silently in their head when hearing a lecture. In reading shadowing, one person reads a passage while his/her partner shadows. Conversational shadowing is in conversation where listeners shadow each other out loud. Complete shadowing indicates shadowing every word a speaker utters. Selective shadowing refers to shadowing only parts of what a speaker says. Finally, interactive shadowing includes selective shadowing and adds questions or comments, like a natural conversation. Except for lecture shadowing, shadowing can be either silent or aloud.

Study 1

The biggest advantage of shadowing is students' involvement in the activity. As they work in pairs, they have more chances to speak and so take on more responsibility for the activity. Although the class becomes somewhat noisy through interacting with each other, the students can participate in the class in a natural and relaxed way.

I chose to do "reading shadowing" because of its suitability for my reading material, and I followed with "Friendly Shadowing" as Fujita (1994) described. I asked one student in each pair to read the text phrase by phrase and made the other student repeat the same phrase without looking at the textbook. Most students were willing to participate in the activity, but a few were not.

However, there are several reasons why some students are not willing to do shadowing. First, if they don't know how to pronounce a word, they cannot read it. For example, when I forced one student to read the sentence, "Earth, you are lucky!" he read, "Each, you are rocky!" In a sense this was good, because then both he and I understood how much he knew about pronunciation. If I made students repeat after me in choral reading, they would just utter sounds without realizing where particular problems lay.

A second reason for avoiding shadowing is due to the classroom atmosphere. For example, as it was early in the year, the students were not yet accustomed to each other and were reluctant to form pairs with a student whom they didn't know well. But, the activity of shadowing helped students get along well with each other. The next time I would try putting on some soft background music so students might relax more without the impression that everyone is listening to them.

Study 2

In the second attempt, I dealt with a list of words so that students could pronounce them more easily. I usually listed new words on the blackboard at the beginning of each lesson and made students pronounce them after me. I wrote down their pronunciation in Katakana under each word and had students shadow them in pairs.

This time the ratio of the students who engaged in the activity increased. This might be because words not sentences were easier for them to pronounce. In addition, as this was the second time they had participated in shadowing, the students knew how to do it already and could start it more easily with a partner.

Shadowing is one way of increasing interaction with others, which is important and essential for learning a language. Repeating what a speaker says can help establish "rapport" and create a better atmosphere for learning in the whole classroom between speakers and listeners (see Footnote 1 below).

In conclusion, when using this technique in the classroom, it is important to get students accustomed to the entire shadowing process. Choosing suitable materials and techniques for students will go a long way towards ensuring success. There are many variations and you can arrange shadowing in such ways as to fit your own situation, and surely it will stimulate your class(see Footnote 2 below).

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References

- Fujita, T. 1994. A magic tool in the classroom: Pair work. English Teaching Forum, 32, 3, pp. 47.
- Murphey, T. 1995. Conversational shadowing for rapport and interactional language acquisition proceedings. Proceedings: The 6th International University of Japan Conference on SLR in Japan International University Publication, pp. 42-65.

Footnote 1

Conversational shadowing reminds me of the counseling lecture I once listened to. Counselor (teachers) shadowing patients (student) is one way of counseling, because patients can feel that counselors listen to them carefully and understand them. It creates "rapport" between patients and counselors. I use this technique with good results when counseling my homeroom students.

Footnote 2

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